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U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN ASIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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# ABSTRACT

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The foreign policy of the United States has been frequently criticized for a lack of consistency. This paper proposes that the U.S. needs to take a look at the geo-political realities and trends of the 1990s and then project ahead ten years to the turn of the century with a desired political environment for Asia. It then describes what the author believes is a realistic scenario that the U.S. should actively and aggressively aim for in the execution of its foreign policy. By staking out a long term position, the U.S. would provide itself a goal to strive for and, coincidentally, a roadmap by which to manage each crisis as it occurs. The establishment of this vision will restore consistency to U.S. foreign policy. (S)

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"The history of the world  
for the next thousand years  
will be written in the Pacific."

General Douglas MacArthur

"The Mediterranean is the sea of the past,  
The Atlantic is the sea of the present,  
And the Pacific is the sea of the future.

Secretary of War Elihu Root

Current United States foreign policy in Asia has its foundations in the aftermath of WWII when the U.S. emerged as the dominant global economic and military power. The other world powers, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan, had each suffered devastation during the war and faced extended periods of recovery. The unique post-WWII environment, the start of which saw the U.S. producing 50% of the world's gross national product and possessing the only nuclear military capability, provided the U.S. with an historic opportunity to significantly shape the global political environment for the latter half of the 20th century. Indeed, through the Marshall Plan and the policy of containment, the U.S. proceeded to do just that. While not always successful, particularly in Eastern Europe, China, and Vietnam, the impact of U.S. foreign policy was enormous and we are living with its results today. But, of equal importance, we are also

living with some of the attitudes that were formed in those halcyon days, and we have been very slow in modifying these attitudes to reflect the changing realities of a dynamic world.

We have not been the sole nuclear power for almost four decades and our portion of the world's GNP has shrunk to 25%. In addition, the rebuilding of many countries after WWII, especially the Phoenix-like rebirths of Germany and Japan, has produced new generations who view the U.S. in fundamentally different ways than their parents. "The new generation clearly is different from the preceeding one - in diversity of social background, formative experiences, professional training, attitudes, and priorities."<sup>1</sup> When this attitudinal change is combined with the geometric growth in technology, a growing economic interdependence, and the "shrinking" of the world due to remarkable advances in communications and international travel, it is clear that the world of the 1990s is dramatically different than that in which current U.S. policies were born.

In fact, for the past two decades the U.S. has suffered because of its reluctance to keep pace with the world changes. "If it is to survive and prove effective, the strategic context of the future cannot be a continuation or repackaging of the past."<sup>2</sup> Recent policy pronouncements by Secretary of State James Baker, and the Bush administration's shift from bilateralism to regionalism augur well for the future, but fall short of the long term vision required to bring coherence and direction to U.S.

foreign policy. Archaic and inflexible attitudes still exist in our relations with Southeast Asia and are threatening our close relationships with Japan and the Newly Industrialized Economies (NIES) of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. "Now it's time to move on....to define and establish the U.S. place in the new era."3

In order to regain its credibility and influence the U.S. must develop a coherent and consistent foreign policy that accurately reflects global realities. "You need a sustained political policy for (the region), not a spot solution for each problem as it occurs."4 To do that the U.S. must have a clear vision of what it would like the world to look like in the early part of the 21st century. This vision will provide the guidelines that will govern U.S. foreign policy decisions. The question then becomes, what kind of world does the U.S. want in the 21st century? This paper will present one alternative and its implications on U.S. foreign policy in the Pacific for the 1990s and the early 21st century.

Before looking at U.S. foreign policy ten years from now, we must first make one major assumption about the resolution of certain situations facing the world in the 1990s. That assumption is that there will be no major conflict in the region during the decade. This allows us to project a world that has changed in an evolutionary vice revolutionary way. This implies that the situations of current instability or potential conflict such as those existing in Korea, Cambodia, China, and Kashmir remain



unchanged or transition in such a way as to not affect the stability of the region in general. I believe this assumption to be a reasonable one that can allow us to project ourselves with reasonable confidence to the end of this decade.

Any credible vision of the future world order must take into account existing realities and then superimpose on these the overarching trends which have arisen in the latter part of this century. The first of these realities is that the U.S. will still be the dominant world power at least well into the first part of the 21st century. "Because America is the only major nation that is both an economic and military superpower....it remains that obvious global leader, especially in the eyes of much of the rest of the world."<sup>5</sup> Much has been made of Paul Kennedy's book, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers", which presents an historical analysis of the fall of previous world powers and projects a similar demise for the U.S. One of the problems with this thesis is that for the next few decades there is no likely successor. "As Kennedy School of Government professor Joseph Nye, Jr. states, 'the United States for the foreseeable future will remain the most powerful state in the world because no other country is likely to achieve both economic and military dominance.'"<sup>6</sup> Or as one Japanese politician put it, "The United States must continue to lead the world - it must become a great nation again."<sup>7</sup>

In his book, "America Overcommitted", Donald Neuchterlein describes the instruments of power that a country possesses -political, economic, and military. A second reality in today's

world is that the economic instrument of power has risen in importance, particularly relative to the military instrument, and will most likely continue to rise in relation to the other instruments of power. As noted in the Kiplinger Washington Letter, "Military issues will recede in importance...as the Soviet threat diminishes and economic competition intensifies. In the future, economic matters will dominate, not military."<sup>8</sup> This is due to the fact that communications and social interfaces have brought people into more frequent interactions with each other, and this has created a worldwide social consensus against the use of military force to settle disputes. Organizations such as the United Nations have focused global outrage against military actions, and states have responded to this pressure. The recent soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, and the uncharacteristic patience of the U.S. in Panama (two years of diplomatic efforts) are all indicative of the fact that countries are not ready to pay the high political costs of military intervention. Japan's status in the world today reflects the increasing importance of economic power. It is recognized as a world power today, yet it possesses no offensive military capability whatsoever. Influence in today's world comes in the form of loans, aid, and technical assistance. But the U.S. has been slow to adjust to this fact. "The United States is putting so much money and effort into the military strand that it has little left over for other economic and political objectives."<sup>9</sup> The U.S. must therefore reorient itself from its

emphasis on the military solutions to economic solutions.

A third reality is the interdependence of the world today. Despite the attempts by China, Albania, North Korea, and Vietnam, self sufficiency for a nation is unrealistic. China gave up on its program, and Albania and North Korea have fallen decades behind their neighbors in economic development. The free market capitalist system has overwhelmed its ideological counterpart, the centralized state system and command controlled economy, and is spreading into Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia. One of the foundations of this system is the free flow of goods and information across national borders. This flow has created an economic interdependence that has become the life support system for some countries (e.g. Japan imports all of its oil and natural resources for manufacture, and 50% of its food grains except for rice). Military interdependence grew out of WWII with the creation of NATO, the Warsaw Treaty Organization and other military alliances. Since then the international arms market has created additional ties between the arms producing countries and those countries who want military hardware, but who cannot produce it themselves. As the leader of the free market world, the U.S. must acknowledge, welcome, and promote this trend.

The world is not a perfect free market, however, and cultural differences remain great. For these reasons, we are in the midst of a transition from a world of nations to a world of regions. "Regionalism is growing as nations tend to relate better towards one another while finding increased independence from both

superpowers."10 The integration of Europe has led the way, particularly through the European Economic Community (EEC) and EC 92, but the rest of the world is not far behind. The Organization of American States (OAS), the Arab League, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Conference (SAARC), the nascent Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (APEC), and the South Pacific Forum are all gaining in prominence. Bilateralism has given way to regionalism and multilateralism as countries try to protect their own markets while trying to penetrate others. In fact, "officials and experts interviewed during recent weeks in a number of Pacific nations agree that the impetus comes from two factors: the fear of trade blocs forming in Europe and North America and the rapid pace of economic interdependence within this region."11 Someday in the distant future there will be a common world market, but the path to that market lies through regional organizations. The U.S. must recognize and accept this new world alignment and work within it to further U.S. interests. Given these realities and trends, let's look at a view of the Pacific that the U.S. would like to see in the next century.

Any U.S. vision of a future Pacific region must incorporate six major players - the USSR, China, Japan, ASEAN, the Indian sub-continent, and Oceania. Let's project a future for each.

Two important facts dominate any analysis of the USSR. The first is that Russia is a major Pacific military power. "Today,

the USSR stations about a third of its military forces in Asia."12 Its Pacific fleet is the largest of its four fleets and significantly outnumbers its U.S. counterpart. Its land and air forces possess the size and technology to project soviet interest throughout the region. This military capability is tempered by a second fact. The USSR is undergoing a remarkable internal restructuring that is truly beyond anything that could have been predicted and is leading to fundamental changes that are unforeseeable. This means that the USSR needs stability in the region just as much as other nations. "Eduard Shevardnadze during the Helsinki Conference in July 1985....said, 'the foreign policy of any state is inseparably linked to its internal affairs and that, in order to implement its vast internal plans to improve the economy, the Soviet Union needs a durable peace....'"13 The unpredictable future does not prevent the U.S. from constructing its own picture of what role the USSR could fit into in the Pacific region. Our "aim should be to create a broad consensus in Asia that the Soviet Union is welcome to participate in the Asian economic 'miracle' (a key Gorbachev goal) if - and only if - Moscow will use its influence to reduce the tensions it has helped to create."14 The USSR must be integrated as much as possible into the economy of Asia. Specifically, the U.S. should look for a more open USSR with the beginning of extensive operations in Siberia using the technical expertise and financing of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China. The natural resources of Siberia should be used to help fuel the economies of other

Asian countries and to help develop Soviet Asia. A Soviet Union integrated into the economic community of Asia would be less likely to resort to military force and, indeed, through negotiations with the U.S., could be led to mutual force reductions throughout the region. In fact, "Central to the Soviet program is the normalization of relations with all major countries in the region, especially China, a reduction in military tensions, and an intensification of trade and economic ties."<sup>15</sup> The U.S. should support this program.

China presents a somewhat similar case, but with some special nuances. China is also in transition and needs to be peacefully prodded towards a free market economy and more internal freedom for its people. Its initial attempt at opening up faltered because of the Communist Party's inability to let go of its power. The U.S. should "work for a general agreement among the more developed, industrialized countries to offer assistance to (the Chinese) economy only on condition of its domestic political liberalization, matching the latter to the former in degree."<sup>16</sup> As the rest of Asia surges ahead, and the Eastern European states begin their recovery, China will be faced with the choice of falling irretrievably behind, or fundamentally changing its economic system. By the 21st century China must have started to change and, with the reintegration of Hong Kong and Macao, will be starting down the free market path. Its place in Asia will be that of a giant marketplace with 1.2 billion consumers. This will not happen overnight, and the poverty ridden population will not

have much to spend, but it offers a wealth of natural resources, the potential of a vast market to the industrialized countries of Asia, as well as the second largest GNP in Asia. The U.S. would like to see a China opening up to the rest of the region economically and beginning to develop her own industrial and technical base.

In contrast to the Soviet Union and China, Japan is a world economic superpower, and is ideologically aligned with the U.S. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Japan's problem is one of overcoming the remnants of her past aggressions and her previous contempt for the rest of Asia. Her ability to overcome these obstacles is aided by the tremendous financial and technical assets she can offer to other countries. The Japanese see their role in a future Pacific quite clearly. "Asked what Japan's role in the world should be, Japanese bureaucrats, businessmen, scholars, and politicians overwhelmingly talk in terms of economics and present an identical agenda. Japan should help to stimulate world economic growth by promoting free trade and importing more, they say. Japan should bolster developing economies as a donor of foreign aid. Japan's government should help formulate new approaches to the international debt crisis...and should contribute not only money but also the efforts of its citizens to international peacekeeping efforts."17 And, "...Japanese foreign policy makers see at least two areas in which Japan can play a distinct role: as a promoter and financier of global peacekeeping efforts and as a defender and intermediary

to Western powers of emerging Asian traders like South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore."18 Japan's role in the Pacific in the 21st century should be one of leadership in economic, technical, and political areas. As the bulwark of American ideals in the region, Japan must take a political leadership role among the free market economies of the Pacific. With American military backing and political support, Japan can effectively promote our common ideology to those countries just emerging from repressive, centralized planning economies.

The ASEAN nations could play a major role in promoting U.S. aspirations in Asia. Their continued economic progress and political activism in the region is crucial to the maintenance of peace and stability in the 90s and the promotion of U.S. interests. Of particular interest will be the reaction of the ASEAN nations to the development of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma. These backward, totalitarian, economically depressed states must be encouraged to begin transitioning to market economies through positive free world responses to their initial attempts at "capitalism", and the U.S. is not the nation to do that. While the U.S., through various political moves, can aid in their transition, the impetus must come from their more prosperous neighbors. ASEAN has played a leading role in addressing the present Cambodian crisis and it should continue to be the forum for settling the issues of the Southeast Asian region.

The Indian sub-continent presents the most potentially



dangerous part of Asia because of the Indo-Pakistani confrontation. Both of these nations will (if they don't already) possess the means to deliver nuclear weapons by the 21st century. Combine this capability with a festering border conflict and a history of warfare in the region, and you come up with the possibility of a regional nuclear exchange. "U.S. interests are seen as being best served 'when South Asian nations are stable, resilient, and strong; capable of preventing outside powers from intruding in their regional affairs.'"19 An American vision of the Indian sub-continent in the 21st century should be one of peace, stability, and warming relations. However, achieving this scenario requires the U.S. to come to grips with an arms race that threatens the entire region. India has built a military force that goes well beyond her self defense requirements and Pakistan is not far behind. How these forces will be used is the issue. India's present relationship with all of her neighbors is poor at best and does not bode well for the future. The challenge for U.S. policymakers is to help build an environment where all of the countries of the sub-continent can develop peacefully. "The United States is the only major state with good ties to India, Pakistan, and China; a regional understanding among these three is in the U.S. interest and not beyond reach."20

Oceania, i.e. Australia, New Zealand, and the countless islands of the Southwest Pacific, covers a vast area with few people and few resources. But this somewhat remote part of Asia remains strategically important to the U.S. because of our common

cultural background with Australia and New Zealand, our common ideology and value system, and our need for commercial and military access to the region. The only two nations who have fought in every one of our wars this century have been these two and they represent our fundamental cultural link with Asia. It is to these two countries that we should look for leadership in the Southwest Pacific and they have eagerly accepted that role. While following their guidance, the U.S. must also recognize and accept its responsibilities to the small island groupings who look to the U.S. for defense and economic assistance. The 21st century should see a continued close relationship between the U.S. and Australia and New Zealand, and an economically vibrant and developing Southwest Pacific.

We are now able to piece together a vision of Asia in the next century that reflects U.S. interests while taking into account the realities of the late 20th century. That vision would reveal a much more economically integrated region, with Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese investment, labor, and technology quickly developing Soviet Asia, and a corresponding reduction in both Soviet and U.S. military forces in the region. It would show China starting to benefit from its new, somewhat free market economy, utilizing the technical and financial expertise of Hong Kong and Macao to interface with investors throughout Asia. We would find Japan extensively involved throughout the region, especially providing financial support to the new ASEAN nations of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and beginning to provide

political leadership in the resolution of regional issues. Our vision must include a stable, peaceful, non-aligned sub-continent with growing economies and a reduced nuclear threat. Finally, it would present us with a renewed vigor and strength in our relationships with Oceania. I feel that this vision is realistic and provides a reasonable stake in the ground for the U.S. to pursue in the execution of its future Asian foreign policy. Let's now look at U.S. foreign policy in the 21st century.

First and foremost, to be effective in the implementation of any foreign policy a country must ensure that it is secure at home. In the case of the United States this implies a major effort to reduce its budget and trade deficits. These deficits can only cause problems with our trading partners and allies, and limit U.S. influence around the globe. As pressure builds both within and without the U.S. for increased aid to Eastern Europe and Latin America, it will become more and more difficult for the U.S. to maintain its economic and military assistance to Asian countries if the U.S. fiscal base is weak. Any diminution in American contributions to the region will inevitably erode U.S. influence and negatively impact on our national interests.

Secondly, the U.S. must accept the fact that it is looked up to as the leader of the western world, and provide that leadership when required. This does not imply that it must therefore be out in front on every issue that arises, and, indeed, for most issues it should promote the initiatives of regional actors. For instance, in Southeast Asia, it should

support ASEAN and follow (when consistent with U.S. interests) its policies in that region. Likewise, we should let Australia and New Zealand set the policies for the Southwest Pacific. The U.S. should not blindly follow these regional leaders, but where our policies and interests coincide, it only makes sense for the U.S. to play a supporting role.

In addition, the U.S. should promote regional solutions to regional conflicts, both where U.S. interests are not an issue, such as the multinational dispute over the Spratly Islands, and where we are intimately involved, such as the Korean peninsula. Also, more emphasis should be placed on use of the United Nations in its historic role as a peacekeeper, and, in a case such as that currently evolving in Cambodia, as a peacemaker. While the U.S. loses some direct influence when organizations such as the U.N. are the primary players, it also avoids being cast as an overbearing superpower and becoming involved in protracted conflicts, such as the Vietnam war.

Thirdly, the U.S. must be receptive to and actively looking for ways to bring China and the Soviet Union into more constructive roles in the region. Geographically they dominate the Asian landmass and contiguous oceans, are home to a significant part of the Asian population, and through their wealth of natural resources offer an opportunity for an economic boom throughout Asia. For half a century they have been bit players on the periphery and its time they became full members, but their integration should not be without conditions. While the

U.S. should not expect either country to embrace capitalism, it should look for some transition of their economies towards a free market system. This should be encouraged at every opportunity. Also, a reduction in the military threat posed by both countries should also be required, which could be reciprocated in part by a corresponding reduction in U.S. forces.

A fourth imperative for the U.S. is to recognize that economics will be the major power factor in the future. It can start by doing two things already suggested - rebuilding a strong home economy and reducing (not eliminating), through negotiations, U.S. military presence around the globe. This requires a restructuring of American military forces and a tightening of its fiscal belt. Because U.S. military presence in Asia is not as great as it is in Europe, force reductions will, by definition, be necessarily smaller. Any remaining U.S. force should be powerful enough that, when combined with the forces of our allies throughout the region, they will be enough to offset any adversary. The U.S. is viewed by many Asian nations as a welcome counterbalance to Russia, China, Vietnam, and India. It is heavily relied upon to ensure freedom of navigation over the many sea and air lanes of communication, and as the ultimate underwriter of the security of the many democratic states in the region. Therefore, the U.S. military presence in the region should be structured and sized to fulfill these requirements.

A fifth imperative is the promotion of interdependence. This is possibly the one great key to a peaceful future. The more

interdependent the world becomes, the less viable war becomes as the means to conflict resolution. The price of military intervention has become too great for many nations even if their military actions are successful. For example, U.S. intervention in South America has for the most part been successful over the past century, yet the long term impact of South American hostility to these acts sours our relations with these countries today and will take generations to overcome. Also, on a macroeconomic level, the more effective and efficient use of resources is realized, hopefully resulting in less waste and the raising of the global standard of living. It also discourages states from taking actions that are not in the general best interest, because other states, through the linkages of interdependence, would have the means to punish the offender. It is by no means a panacea, but it would certainly be more effective than the nationalist setup in the world today.

The U.S. is a major participant in the economies of Europe and Asia. Both regions are in the process of forming economic organizations. The U.S. has been included in the initial meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperative Conference (along with Canada) and has been excluded from the European Economic Community. Given that U.S. trade with Canada and Asia will probably be about three times that with Europe (presently it's over twice as much and growing), the U.S. should look closely at joining APEC or use the threat of membership as a means of improving its trade position with the EEC. This will be a

politically sensitive issue, but potentially a great opportunity for the U.S. to profitably position itself for the future.

Lastly, the U.S. should live up to its role as the leader of the western world by actively promoting and supporting democracy, human rights, and free market economies throughout the region. All the elements of power should be employed, where appropriate, to pressure those countries whose policies are contrary to the ideals of human freedom. Firm actions, both positive ones and negative ones, will help build a world order which best supports U.S. national interests.

In summary, the U.S. has long suffered from a lack of vision in the foreign policy arena. This has led to inconsistent and often counterproductive actions, which have offended non-aligned states and embarrassed our allies. The 21st century holds great promise for the U.S., but only if it can learn from its past. The time has come for us to define the future we want, and thus provide a positive reference for each policy decision that must be made. Only through doing so will the U.S. finally fulfill the hopes and expectations that others have had of us all along. As Winston Churchill once said, "In the end, Americans will always do the right thing, after exhausting all other alternatives."<sup>21</sup>

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